Food for Thought

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MPERIAL CULTURE IS A CRUEL PHENOMENON. IT CANNOT

flourish without racism. So they—Bush and Rice—are blaming it on India and China for unprecedented increase in food prices in recent months. Their racist outlook borders on lunacy when they say populations in these economies consume more cereals and meat triggering the current wave of what they call 'food inflation'. But consumption in India and China remains well below that of industrial countries and, Indians and Chinese are not asking Americans and Europeans to consume less.
There has been a 150 percent incrase in the price of rice—the main staple in India and China and elsewhere in southeast Asia—since the start of 2008. Faced with strong criticisms from different quarters because of racial comments Bush and his men finally indulged in damage control exercise while attributing the surge in oil prices (at $122 a barrel as reported last week), partly though to the increased demand in India and China. They are trying to make India and China scapegoats to sidetrack the bigger problem, created in the first place, by the IMF, WB as well as WTO. Food prices have surged internationally as agri-multinationals have virtually mo-nopolised the world food market.
Given the emerging pattern of market mayhem, the idea of right to food
as enshrined in the United Nations system sounds ludicrous. The number of hungry mouths has increased ever since 1996 despite official commitment at the 2000 Millennium Summit and at the 2002 World Food Summit, to reduce hunger. People are dying at a time when the world is richer than ever before. And yet 6 million children under 5 are killed every year by malnutrition and related illnesses. India has the dubious distinction of having the highest number of people living below poverty line with no purchasing power. And higher prices of food are hitting even middle and low income groups in India. In 2007 food grains reportedly 'accounted for two thirds of the increase in the consumer price index for Asia and almost half for Africa.' What Bush has, somewhat deliberately, failed to tell the world is how biofuels are affecting food market to the disadvantage of the poor in the third world. Whether they like it or not, aggressive designs by the so-called green companies to have biofuels at any cost, have driven the run-up in grain prices.

It takes about 200 kg of maize to
fill one car's tank with bio-fuel (about 50 litres), which is enough food to feed one person for one year. Biofuel will leave the poor and hungry in developing countries at the mercy of rapidly rising prices for food, land and water. In all probability, food prices will rise dramatically in the near future if the production of biofuels is increased. The way In-dia's dryland is being brought under biofuel economy, is simply bone-chill-ing.

Also, how transnational corpora-
tions destroying food security and minting millions is being conveniently overlooked. Just 10 corporations, including Aventis, Monsanto, Pioneer and Syngenta control one third of the $23 billion commercial seed market and 80 percent of the $28 billion global pesticide market. An-other 10 corporations, including no-torious Cargill, control 57 percent of the total sales of the world's leading 30 retailers and account for 37 per-cent of the revenues earned by the world's top 100 food and beverage companies.
The alarming food situation was
highlighted by the UN human rights expert Jean Ziegler in his recent re-port presented to the Human Rights Council. But UN mechanism can hardly reverse the neo-liberal trade regime. The impact of greater trade liberalisation on peasant farmers is nowhere so devastating as in the continuing suicide by Indian farmers And international investors have, re-cently 'disrupted the balance of food supply and demand by snapping up commodities to, diversify their port-folios'.
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erally failed to act in this crisis situ-ation. The issue has become one of survival for the weaker sections of the population. But people's anger at the government's failure to intervence effectively is yet to cross tolerable limits.

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